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SUBJECT: ICARDA and USDA Developing Cooperation on Water and Food Safety

1. Summary: USDA/FAS water specialist Sylvana Li and Amman-based ESTH FSN Rana Safadi visited the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) in Aleppo, Syria September 22-23 to develop new activities with ICARDA on water reuse and water quality. Li will work with ICARDA in preparing USDA's water management for food safety workshop planned for Tunis in 2006. USDA/FAS/ICD and FAS/Rabat work closely with ICARDA on watershed management and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) projects in Tunisia and other NEA locations. End summary.

ICARDA Working to Increase Water Productivity

2. ICARDA Assistant General Manager for Research William Reskine expressed interest in cooperation with the USG and with American NGOs. Li described an upcoming USDA-sponsored workshop in Tunisia in Fall 2006 on water management for food safety, and asked for ICARDA assistance with that workshop and more generally, with USDA's work on water reuse and water quality.

3. ICARDA staffers Manzoor Qadir and Bogachan Benli discussed the organization's Management of Scarce Water Resources and Mitigation of Drought in Dry Areas (MP1) project. MP1 does research on sustainably increasing water productivity in arid areas. The scope of the MP1 project began at the farm level, and has expanded to the basin level in Central and West Asia and North Africa (CWANA). Fifteen countries in that region are below the water poverty level, according to ICARDA. Renewable water resources are limited, and rainfall is highly variable and unpredictable. According to ICARDA, West Asia and North Africa are forecast to get hotter and drier, exacerbating water scarcity and increasing drought frequency. These changes will further threaten the already precarious livelihoods of the poor, especially in the rural areas, who depend on agriculture.

4. ICARDA is working with national programs in the region to increase water productivity through better management of water resources, development of drought tolerant crops, and agronomic management of cropping systems. This requires development of supportive policy options, and building the capacities of farmers, extensionists, and researchers.

Land Management for Combating Desertification

5. Project Director Richard Thomas and Range Management Scientist Jim Tiedman talked about their Land Management for Combating Desertification project (MP3). Desertification is sometimes caused by natural degradation, but in many areas degradation is accelerated by human activities. ICARDA aims to identify options for rehabilitating degraded land resources, and to improve and strengthen systems of land management to control degradation and sustain future production.

Field Trip

6. Adriana Bruggeman led a field trip in areas around Aleppo on September 23. The trip included the Qwayk valley, irrigated areas near Sfere, Jabbul Salt Lake, and Khanasser Valley, where the MP1 water management project operates. The field trip showcased the water and drought situation in that part of Syria, and ICARDA's efforts in dealing with the issue. There is great potential for wastewater treatment and water reuse for agricultural applications in Syria.

Background on ICARDA

7. ICARDA, established in 1977, is one of the 15 agricultural research centers located around the world supported by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). With its main research

station and offices based in Aleppo, Syria, ICARDA works through a network of partnerships with national, regional and international institutions, universities, non-governmental organizations and ministries in the developing world; and with research institutes in industrialized countries.

18. ICARDA's mission is to improve the welfare of poor people and alleviate poverty through research and training in dry areas of the developing world by increasing agricultural production, productivity and nutritional quality while preserving the natural resource base. ICARDA works with national agricultural research organizations in developing and industrialized countries. While most of ICARDA's collaborative activities are based on written agreements, some joint research is also carried out informally based on the center's personal contacts with colleagues in other institutions.

19. This cable has been cleared by Embassy Damascus and by Dr. Li.

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